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CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY
OFFICE OF CURRENT INTELLIGENCE

22 July 1961

MEMORANDUM

SUBJECT: France-Tunisia

1. The confluence of critical issues faced by the French government makes the Tunisian situation particularly dangerous for De Gaulle. While he recognizes the reasons behind Bourguiba's agitation, he is in no position to accommodate the Tunisian's demands for withdrawal of French forces. He will be anxious to limit hostilities, however, and with the sea and land approaches to the Bizerte base now under French control, Paris can be expected to try to seek an early cease-fire agreement with the Tunisians. Nevertheless, die-hard opponents of De Gaulle's North African policies will be eager to block efforts to ease tension, and there is a continuing danger that extremists among them will take violent action with serious consequences for the Gaullist regime. If Tunisian reports of French attacks on military objectives in southern Tunisia are correct, Paris may already be faced with an explosive disciplinary situation which might come to a head when such operations are ordered discontinued or when the French forces in question are recalled to the Algerian side of the border.

2. The key factor is still the question of whether the French armed forces will abide by policy directives from Paris. Interior Minister Frey
State Department review completed

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told Ambassador Gavin just before hostilities broke out at Bizerte that the internal situation in the French army is the gravest problem confronting France. Top military leaders heretofore fully obedient to De Gaulle's directives were reportedly resentful over the way in which he by-passed the general staff to order reinforcements to Bizerte, and army and air commanders reportedly feel he failed to give them adequate warning on the Bizerte situation.

3. If military extremists supported by right-wing elements in Algeria and France succeeded in committing the army to extensive mopping-up operations in Tunisia with the intent of destroying the 15,000 Algerian rebel forces there, De Gaulle's whole program for reducing France's burden in North Africa would be threatened. If he failed to impose his control, broad internationalization of the conflict could ensue, particularly if the Algerian rebels called for Soviet bloc support.

4. The emotional repercussions of the Tunisian incident play into the hands of such extremist elements as the terrorist Secret Army Organization (OAS) which is causing increasing concern to French security officers and to the Paris government. If this group were to carry out its reported plan to assassinate De Gaulle, it is doubtful an orderly succession would be possible. The regime would be unlikely to survive the dissipation of the current anomalous situation in which De Gaulle is widely popular while the Debre government, which implements his policies, is subjected to growing public and parliamentary criticism. The military would be readily persuaded that a popular front threat made armed-forces intervention imperative. In

such a situation military subjugation of Algeria and probably of Tunisia and Morocco would follow. France's military position in Europe would be further reduced, the threat of Communist infiltration into North Africa greatly enhanced, and support for the French Communist party dangerously increased.

5. The best France can hope for on the Bizerte situation at the moment is a temporary impasse in view of Bourguiba's insistence that negotiations cannot be limited to discussing a cease fire. Continued firmness on De Gaulle's part may be sufficient to discourage extremists from rash action while the cooling-off period Paris considers necessary permits assessment of the situation. Here again, events beyond his control may spark new trouble. Algerian Moslems might be induced to demonstrate in an expression of sympathy for the Tunisians, or the PAG leaders might decide to call off their negotiations with France. If De Gaulle then attempted to implement his regroupement proposals, French military leaders might be tempted to refuse to withdraw to a restricted coastal perimeter. They might argue that the unilateral French cease fire was overtaken by events, and demand the right to pursue the FLN forces in Tunisia.

6. In any event, France's allies face an embarrassing sequence of events in the UN. A protracted debate is in prospect in the Security Council, where a vote on some type of resolution probably cannot be avoided. (The 1958 debates on Bizerte did not result in a vote). A veto in the Security Council may lead to a call for a special session of the General Assembly, where the Afro-Asians may be able to force through a resolution demanding France withdraw from all of Africa